











## WE'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE

Photo by Ray Archer



...not only with the celebration, but also the excellence, performance and results that saw Tony Cairoli fighting for victory in a race where he could have cruised to a ninth world title. Assen was the third party of nine for the Sicilian on Dutch sand. Judging by his state later that evening then emphatic comebacks certainly taste good.



## GREEN SHOOTS?

Signs of resurgence for the USGP occurred at a WW Motocross Ranch near Gainesville; a venue that drew a healthy attendance for a first attempt at an international event and tightly squeezed between some horrendous weather in Florida. Jeffrey Herlings stomped over American soil for the second time in a week but has one of the more unstable fixtures on the calendar now found a sure footing?

Photo by Ray Archer







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OVER TO YOU





Going to Assen was a lot like re-visiting a play: you knew the outcome (a Herlings win and a Cairoli title) but there was still the enjoyment of watching it all occur, coupled with the slim chance that the lights could fail or a prop would go wrong.

The paddock was in the slightly odd position of watching the seemingly permanent rain that fell on Assen until Sunday while thanking their fortunes that the whole show was able to escape Florida before Hurricane Irma drifted across. Hurricane 'Cairoli' was still blowing through Dutch skies however. The Italian's piercing speed that won Grands Prix in Qatar, Arco and Ottobiano was slightly less devastating (the Red Bull KTM man having eased off his training/riding to minimise risk in the last few weeks) but the consistency and racecraft was thundering.

Cairoli only needed a few points from the first moto at Assen but gunned to his fifteenth holeshot and seemed on for another victory until Jeffrey Herlings predictably forced through. Surprisingly the soon-to-be 32 year old held onto the back of his teammate and only a second split them at the line. Cairoli over-jumped and let the 450 SX-F fly loose in jubilation.

The race aptly summed up #222's season. All the hall-marks of his resurgence were

evident: the lighting start indicating that he finally found the set-up sweet spot of the 450 SX-F after sustained testing and deliberation through 2015 and 2016 (he even went back to the 350 SX-F at one point), the attacking fearlessness, the savvy to wait, watch and go after Herlings again, the top three prioritisation and of course the conditioning that has seen Tony and Jeffrey find a new plinth of performance away from a pack that are starting to feel the seven months, eighteen GPs/weekend and thirty-six motos, not to mention continued worries over 2018 contracts for some of the group. Team Manager Claudio De Carli commented that one of the most astonishing aspects of his ninth championship year was that Cairoli could dominate MXGP for so long, miss the goal for two seasons, and then return to the top.

A Cairoli/Red Bull KTM celebration is by no means a strange sight in MXGP this decade but there was a hint of nostalgia about this one. A feeling also that class and dedication can still run higher and better compared to youth in one of the most brutal and punishing motorsports there is.

Some of the talking points then from a third Dutch GP at the famous racing venue and with the rumours of a Motocross of Nations slot growing in intensity...





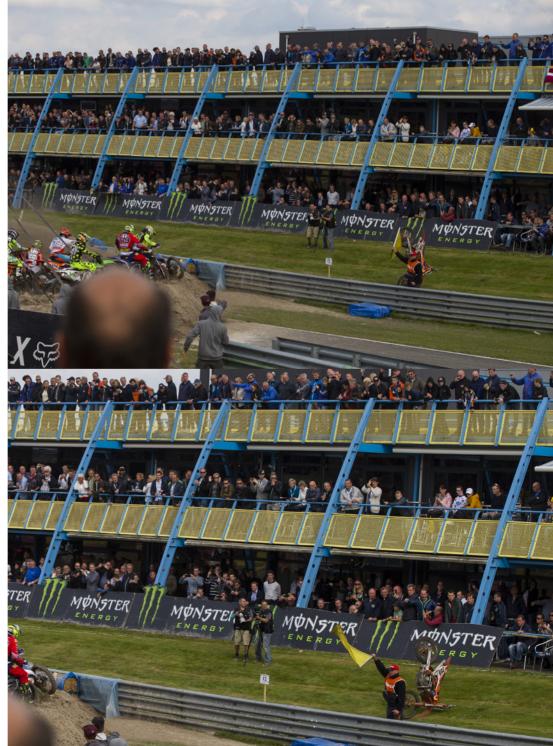


The temporary sandy construction was a swampy mess on Friday and Saturday morning before the rain finally relented but ended up being surprisingly resistant. The air hung heavy with damp and the odour of fried clutches as the GP classes and another three categories (WMX, VMX and Honda 150s) also tried to cut through the terrain.

As usual riders tended to love or loathe the layout. "The track was almost perfect in the second moto: it had such a good flow," said MX2 winner Jorge Prado, and others praised the maintenance and 'recovery' of the surface after the showers. Another school of thought highlighted the 'sketchy' nature of the track, with the tight trajectory leaving little room for error next to the asphalt and the steel barriers. Clement Desalle. Tim Gajser and Jeremy Van Horebeek all experienced big crashes and both Desalle and Gaiser did not appear for the second moto. At the time of writing the Monster Energy Kawasaki rider is dealing with a lower back injury that looks that though it will end his 2017. Glenn Coldenhoff's bike looped off the track and arrived to the fringes of the crowd in a second moto. second corner pile-up. Others remarked that the sand had worn down to the hallowed Assen tarmac.

The circuit is still home to the best 'road race' conversion MXGP has seen in recent years and the packing of the crowd in the GT tribune and large TV screen provision opposite makes for a comfortable and atmospheric gathering. It will be curious to see what Imola can generate as host of the 2018 season-closer.





Like most of the 2017 trail todate MX2 swung one way and then back in another. Pauls Jonass' holeshot in the first moto from the outside of the gate and 21st pick was one of the most sensational sights in the story so far. That the Latvian could recover, beat a scourging Prado and take 25 points while title rival Jeremy Seewer laboured in fifth place was a stunning ride in the wake of his nervous aspect and uncharacteristic mistakes during Qualification on Saturday. Jonass only needed to finish ahead of Seewer in the second moto for KTM to wrap up both categories but Prado had other ideas after passing the lively Conrad Mewse (set to ride for Hitachi KTM in 2018 by all accounts). Seewer was also strong and noticeably faster. He pushed to catch the Spaniard and his second place not only put him on the podium behind Jonass but drew the championship saga to the final episode in France. Jonass was less effective in the second moto and seemed to wear, and be weighed down, by the realisation that he was close to a piece of history.

One observation from the MX2 affair was the puzzling situation between Prado and Jonass in the first moto and the Spaniard and Latvian racing close, with the rookie seemingly oblivious to the idea of protecting and assisting his teammate (thus team and brand) to a safe winning run.

It was not the first time they have shared inches of track space but the bigger picture formed a hefty background impossible to ignore. One can CR only imagine the fallout if the pair had clashed and Jonass suffered. "If I pass him then it's because I am faster. If that's the case then I deserve to win. Motocross, like I have said many times, is an individual sport," Prado said. "Of course we are a team and we help each other but it is an individual sport. We both cannot win." Jonass did bag the 25 points however in a performance that was pivotal to his long quest for the crown and the gold transformation of red number plate that has been in his possession since round five.









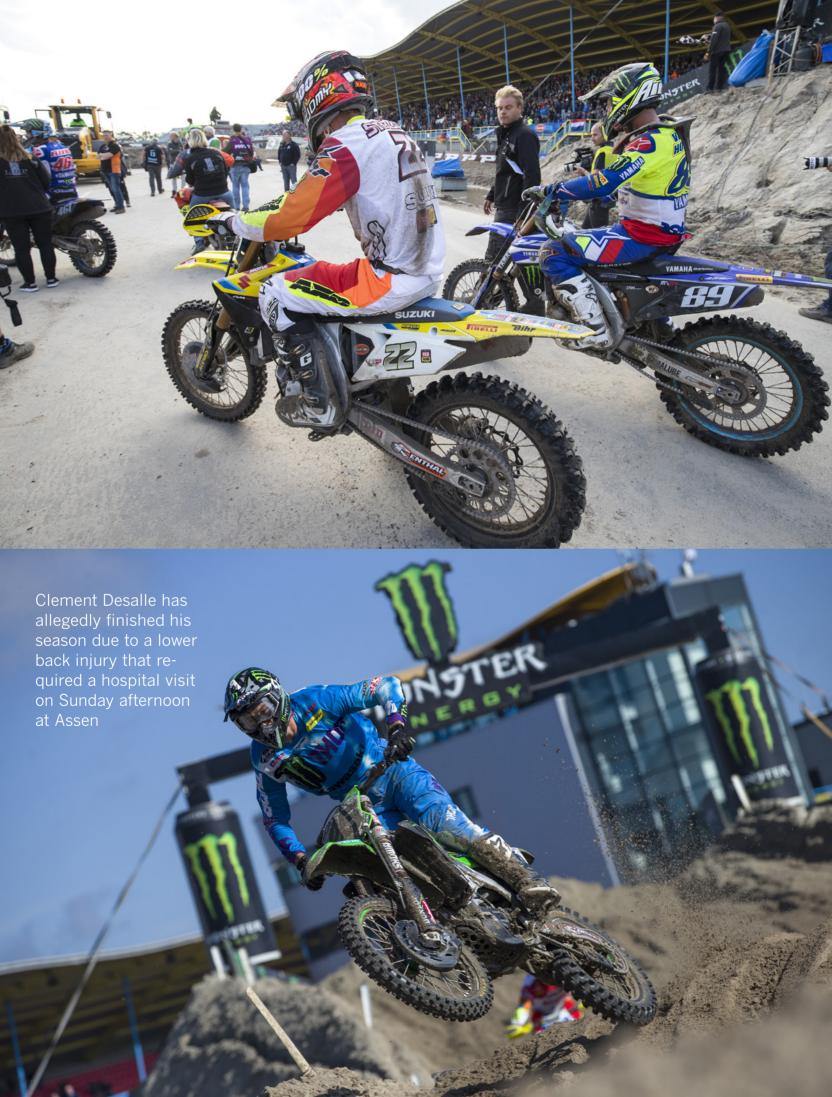
Lost in the Cairoli hubbub was more excellence from Herlings. The Dutchman looked more on-edge ploughing back through the top five to catch his teammate in the first moto but was a picture of mastery in the second and built up an advantage that dwarfed the others. Assen was a fourth GP win from the last five rounds and fifth victory in six weeks if you include his AMA achievement in Indiana - that could have been six if his chain hadn't broken in Sweden while sailing to the front at Uddevalla. His end-of-season form is a complete reverse to the results of 15-17-9-12-8 he managed at the start of the year while massaging a broken hand and a bruised MX2-fluffed ego. Jeffrey was magnanimous in ceding the stage to Tony even if his fans lapped up the first MXGP class home success: #84 blowing kisses to the grandstand as he rolled to the finish. Herlings, now officially runner-up in MXGP 2017 ("which means I am the first loser," he said) is not accustomed to defeat. He has rarely been beaten and has sampled the sour taste only when his capabilities have been hobbled by injury. To a degree 2017 was like that. but he doesn't have to look far - across an awning - for an example of how a championship campaign is successfully weathered at a higher level.

Understandably there is tension simmering in the long orange race truck and it will take come careful management of the team in 2018 to cotton-wrap the situation and emotions between two riders that will be pushing themselves and the limits of co-operation. The private riders changing/lounge area that links the MX2/Herlings area of the team and the De Carli section seems to have become a 'no-mans land' in recent weeks: it is rare vou will find many of the athletes in there together and it was a healthy buffer between the two rivals. It is a sign of the times in MXGP that 2018 already seems enticing before '17 has even wrapped.





















## HOW THE WORLD BECAME ORANGE

We've extoled the talent and resilience of both Tony Cairoli and Jeffrey Herlings though Blog entries this season but what about KTM? The manufacturer is heading for a double world crown and there is little doubting the voracity of the platform the Austrians have been able to give all five of their factory riders in both Grand Prix classes.

Cairoli may have just delivered the firm's first world title for the 450 SX-F - meaning that the bike now has the full set with AMA Supercross and Motocross accolades - after five with the 350 SX-F between 2010 and 2014 but the MX2 effort is undoubtedly more impressive. Ben Townley once described the original 250 SX-F with which he won the inaugural MX2 contest in 2004 as "so fast it was embarrassing", and that bedrock of speed and engine power has made the Red Bull MX2 slot the most desirable saddle in the class ever since. Cairoli (2005, 2007 with Yamaha), Christophe Pourcel (2006) and Tim Gajser (2015) are the only athletes to have interrupted KTM's MX2 streak. Tyla Rattray, Marvin Musquin, Ken Roczen, Jeffrey Herlings (three times), Jordi Tixier and with Pauls Jonass almost there

mean that something is very right with the simple but devastatingly effective 250cc architecture. Indeed, KTM's progress with the four-stroke engine since the early years of the last decade was the base for their Enduro success as well as elements of the technology feeding into the Moto3 programme.

Credit for KTM's prolificacy has to go down to Pit Beirer and Robert Jonas. The German and Austrian conspired to make bold (and often ballsy) moves to ensure the best possible people and staff occupied key places. The construction of this system meant an ethos towards teamwork and connecting departments like R&D, design and racing to a streamlined and rapid effect. Swooping for Cairoli midway through 2009 when Yamaha had their 'Decca Records/Bea-

tles' moment and ensuring the Sicilian would be able to acclimatise and deliver from the 'off' with what was a brave and completely untried project with the 350 SX-F was down to their vision of also snaring the whole Claudio De Carli set-up.

The same wholesale approach was applied to North America with their complete conviction in Roger De Coster and his wishes for the AMA operation; an organisation so devastatingly good that even company CEO Stefan Pierer has publically admitted he was proved wrong in how supercross success could influence sales and turnover in the biggest market for dirt bikes.

In Europe De Carli oversaw and guided the Cairoli-350 train to four years of unsurpassable energy and acclaim but the elevation



By Adam Wheeler

of German Dirk Gruebel with his ever-present staff like Valentina Ragni, Wayne Banks and formerly Rami Falt kept the technical element of the race team at a high level and thus ensured MX2 stayed at a peak.

It wasn't all rosy. Beirer and Jonas' strategy came from some painful and forced re-thinking. In 2006 KTM thumbed the chequebook with glee by opting for big name athletes Mickael Pichon and Sebastien Tortelli. MXGP (then branded as MX1) had begun in 2004 and Belgian Steve Ramon (who would be his country's last world champion in the premier class when he took the 2007 title with Suzuki) would be the division's first ever moto winner and on the new 450 SX-F at a rainy Zolder. KTM worked but also sat on their laurels in those first years and when Pichon melted down after a few races and guit in '06. and Tortelli crashed and entered retirement by round three in Portugal the whole effort managed by the late Georges Jobe was a red-faced and polarising mess. The company's racing output at a time when a vast Street portfolio of bikes and MotoGP was a fanciful dream was placed in the hands of offering satellite riders like Max Nagl and Jonathan Barragan works support. Now, Gruebel admits the 450 SX-F was heading in a wrong direction, having been cobbled together on principals of the Enduro bike. The later editions of the 450 were crafted more as a pure motocrosser.

Beirer was new to the role in the wake of Kurt Nicoll's stewardship at that time and recognised that KTM had to be more careful and considerate in their placement and planning, while also remaining poised to seize any opportunity that came along; as proved to be the case with Cairoli and Marvin Musquin's ugly team dispute with Honda midway through 2009.

The departments in Mattighofen (and later Munderfing, the racing HQ a few miles down the road) were pulled together and seeds were sprinkled.

Beirer, who now has to spread himself between MotoGP, Supercross and MXGP appearances (even if it is Jonas who heads off-road), has been vindicated in almost all of his decisions and judgements to the point where his dealings with the board of directors and relationship with Red Bull is responsible for millions of euros and many people's livelihoods and has indirectly affected fans' enjoyment and perception of racing around the globe. It is a pressurised and frantic job and the German must still be holding the throttle in sixth gear as KTM continue to fly in MX, win the Dakar and wade through the first term of MotoGP.

Crucially the investment in racing has paid off for KTM through hard numbers and brand awareness. For the sixth year in a row global sales and revenue reached new heights in 2016; inflating 10.1% and 11.7% respectively and breaching the one billion barrier. The R&D department has grown from thirty at the start of the century to almost six hundred as KTM invested

over 100 millions euros into their projects and output. Alliances with Bajaj and expanding international motorcycle production aside, their brand values continue to ring-true for off-road. It is here where MXGP, Supercross, Dakar and Enduro spoils have paid-off and more than 46% of total income was banked. Crucially off-road growth was recorded at more than 23% of revenue and almost 21% for bikes sold in 2016. One can only imagine that the figures will climb again after all the wins and titles are counted and all the marketing and PR of the latest roll call of glory is fired out.

More than perhaps any other brand KTM have shown that while you have to pay to race, racing can also pay. Boiled down to the basics they are making the equation work. Then add on all the extra advantages to do with image – the branding, the amazing starts, the marketable athletes, the technical reliability (previously KTM's biggest Achilles heel) - and its clear that the Austrian are nudging their competitive structure and reason-for-being on the track as close to optimum as possible.

The only drawback to what they have accomplished over the years and specifically in 2017 is the formation of an 'empire': the big target they now wear and how people will almost rejoice in any failure or defeat, like any sporting behemoth. I imagine that KTM, especially Pit, will enjoy that position though, and it says a lot for their achievements and belief that they will vocally embrace any challenger.











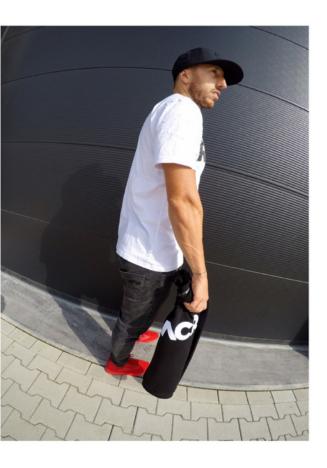
www.racr.it

## racr

A timely moment to have another glance at the MXGP World Champion's new lifestyle brand with their biggest pop-up stall appearing at Assen last weekend and the first offering of product being sold out at the Grand Prix of Lombardia earlier in the summer when 'RACR' was launched. So far the range is a small and simple collection of t-shirts, caps and hoodies, not to mention the Shade eyewear that is a key feature. The website is now live and the material of the garments feels like good quality. Well worth a look.















# IT'S COMPLICATED...

The USGP held a couple weeks ago at the WW Ranch outside of Jacksonville was, to me anyways, an interesting look at whether the MXGP series can survive in America or not. I'll get there eventually but indulge me on this story...

The wife and I are fans of 90's rock band Third Eye Blind and although most people think of them as having a couple of records in the late 90's and the massive hit "Semi Charmed Kind of Life", they've actually been making new music for a long time now and it's pretty good. They've been touring on and off for years and you don't see them playing huge venues or being mentioned among the huge bands like U2 or Coldplay, but you know what? Their concerts in the smaller venues (in some cities that the huge acts would never go) are among the best shows we've ever been to. The people there are just like us, they love all six of their CD's. It doesn't matter that the venue holds 1000 or 2000 people, everyone there knows every word to every song and a great time is had by all.

Back to the motocross stuff: I've not been to a USGP outside of Glen Helen last couple of years and back in 2010 and 2011 when the circuit exited the USA national series and picked up a couple of MXGPs. If the USGP's had a status on Facebook with the sport it would most likely be on "It's complicated". Although it wasn't always that way going back to the 70's and 80's but somewhere along the way, say the mid-90's, bringing the FIM Motocross World Championship to the USA became...different and difficult.

Whether it was the promoters over here losing money from lack of spectators, the riders not coming out to race or America's rise to SX and MX dominance that began in the early 80's and probably stopped around the turn of this century; something made

the GP series less desirable to the USA riders, the teams, the media and yes, the fans.

For the most part the USGPs at Glen Helen have been a disaster anywhere off the track. On the track we've seen great races, the course itself is good but there were no fans, barely any riders that weren't contracted to be there by the energy drink sponsors. If you had gone to say, Unadilla, in 1986 and told a fan there that in a twenty year span (1994 to 2014) there would be a grand total of three USGP's held, they'd have smashed you with their beer can. Back then it would've been inconceivable, as everyone loved to see the red, white and blue racers up against the world's best not too mention the half a dozen American racers doing the series over there.



By Steve Matthes

Smash cut to today and I think that Youthstream is on the right path to success over here with the WW Ranch race. Forget the "over it" and "we have two supercrosses and a national here every year" crowd in Southern California (where Glen Helen is) and forget the very expensive purpose built tracks at places like Charlotte Raceway.

Play to the strengths of the series and go visit venues that don't have the national series once a year. The parts of America (mostly the Southeast) that are underserved when it comes to seeing motocross are where the series should look to go. WW Ranch looked to have a good crowd there and I'm sure it's because the fans in the area just don't have any nationals to go to. Maybe in the future YS could look to Texas, another state that has some great tracks but haven't had many nationals. Work with the promoters over here to keep the fees for the race as low as possible and sacrifice profit to keep the series in the biggest motorcycle market in the world.

I know every single person associated with the MXGP series that I speak to think it's very important to race in the USA and enjoy coming here despite the travel difficulties.

I know when the alliance between Youthstream and MX Sports was announced, it was hoped to bring more top level USA based racers here but that didn't really happen. I've been reading the great daily stories on the history of the USGPs on Racer X over the last few weeks and it struck me that the events have never really entertained all the top guys. This year there were supposed to be three premier USA riders at WW ranch in Eli Tomac, Justin Barcia and Cooper Webb before Webb got hurt in practice. Looking at some random USGP's from the "glory days" then we see: 1990 Glen Helen 500 USGP 3 (Rick Johnson, Johnny O'Mara, Jeff Matiasevich) 1991 Glen Helen 500 USGP 3 (Jean Michel Bayle, Jeff Ward, Damon Bradshaw) 1988 Unadilla 250 USGP 3 (Rick Johnson, Bob Hannah, Micky Dymond)

1986 Carlsbad 500 USGP 4 (Rick Johnson, David Bailey, Jeff Ward, Ron Lechien)

And so on and so on. Not as many of the top Americans that you thought lined up for these things right?

When it comes to the USGPs maybe after so many stops and starts since the early 90's, everyone has finally understood how to make these fixtures work. Don't try and be like U2, think more like Third Eye Blind.









## 100%

A new shift for 100% begins by clicking on the website. The previous pages actually won a design award so the fresh look for the San Diego firm had to meet the same level and they seem to have hit the mark. Check it out by clicking on any of the links on these pages. The uplift comes with release of the 2018 product lines and revised colours and schemes for the premium Racecraft goggle as well as the Accuri. Our choice is the Eclipse, Fourth or Roxburry with the mirrored lenses.

100% is more than just riding eyewear these days and their experiments with gloves have led to six different models depending on the degree of use and the purpose for the rider. We own a pair of Airmatic for running around on a 125cc Honda Scooter and they are ideal for grip, comfort and resistance to the washing machine. We'll have a more in-depth look at the leisure and performance apparel and glasses in the next issue but for now have a browse at their wares for the eyes and hands

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**MXGP STARS TALK ABOUT** THE NEED TO GET ON A **MOTORCYCLE AWAY FROM** A RACE TRACK

By Adam Wheeler Photos by Ray Archer

# FEATURE

otorcycles: tricky things. Especially if your job is to go considerably fast on one. Thanks to the misfortune of Valentino Rossi in his extracurricular riding activities away from a very high profile and well paid profession this year – and thus casting light on risk-versus-reward – the perils of scratching new limits in any kind of two-wheeled outing is further under the microscope.

In comparison to MotoGP and World Superbike, MXGP and motocross stars practically 'live' on their race bikes and the factory stars are frequently riding and training with fully-kitted versions of their works machinery. The ease of use (even if MX tracks have faced their own issues and threats through environment concerns over the last decade) is both a luxury and a knife edge that road racers don't have with their respective mounts and thus they are forced to find other ways to maintain 'the feeling'.

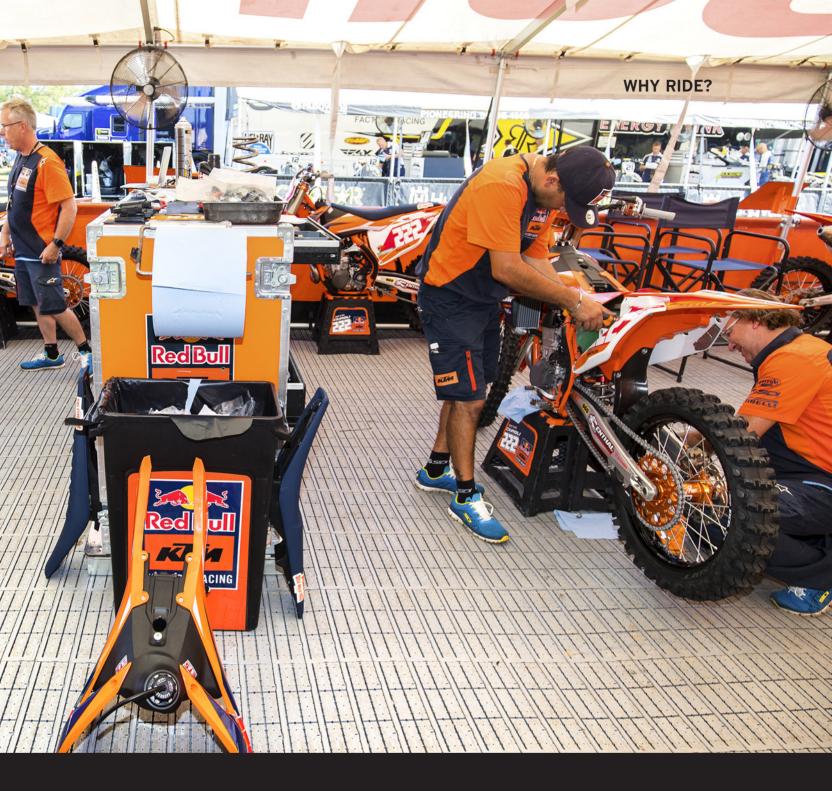
Why do motorcycle professionals need to heighten the peril of missing a crucial race or chunk of the season by turning laps in their own time? It seems a simple question with a fairly obvious answer but there are a few factors involved: Is it bike fitness? Is it to do with confidence?



# SIMPSON: "EVERYONE IS STRIVING TO BE THAT LITTLE BIT BETTER AND PEOPLE ARE LEANING MORE TOWARDS FINDING THAT EXTRA PERCENTAGE IN THE GYM, THROUGH COACHES, PHYSICAL TRAINERS, NUTRITION, PROGRAMMES AND ALDON BAKER-TYPE STUFF."

Is it just the 'accepted thing'? Is there a degree of peer pressure with social media allowing more people to have more insight and some mind games come into play? Do riders really know at all why they head to the track?

Motocrossers are a fertile petri dish for this little study. They arguably indulge in their sport more often than any other motorcycle athlete and therefore sit closer to the margin of costly error on a weekly basis (it is no coincidence that



Tony Cairoli tapered-off his riding days as the 2017 MXGP title came closer to his grasp). It could be said that Rossi was taking more of a risk motocrossing or riding enduro because he was out of his natural habitat but a bike is still a bike and MX is notoriously unforgiving regardless of the level; and Cairoli will happily attest to the fact as his 2016 campaign was ruined by nerve damage in the wake of a pre-season practice prang.

We ventured into the MXGP paddock to gather some opinions and ask about methods and motivations. It was clear that the examination of such an accepted part of their lifestyle was a little unusual. 'Why ride?' was a question that initially caught a few on-the-hop but also elicited some revealing material...



Rasmus Jorgensen, former MX2 Grand Prix racer and now Rockstar Energy Husqvarna rider coach to Thomas Kjer Olsen, Thomas Covington, Conrad **Mewse**: Everything is so intense now. There is no room for error. When you put on the helmet then you need to be 100% focussed because everything can go wrong so quickly. Everybody is searching for that little bit extra but they are already on the limit. So much of training away from the track is mental because at this level everybody can ride a bike. People need to be so strong mentally. To see a rider like Jeffrey Herlings to come back from the hole he was in at the beginning of 2017 is quite incredible. Obviously he has a great crew behind him but you also have to do a lot of work mentally.

#### Max Anstie, Rockstar Energy IceOne Husqvarna, MX2 Grand Prix winner, podium finisher in MXGP debut season:

The main thing with motocross is that there is such a feel to it. A feel with the conditions: if it is sandy, hard-pack and then the jumps are a big thing. If you have a couple of weeks off the bike then you feel a bit stiff on the jumps and not as fluid.

### Shaun Simpson, Wilvo Yamaha, MXGP race winner, multi British Champion:

Pre-season you need to get your race fitness up and then the internationals will start and then the GPs. If you have something like two weeks off the bike then you just feel a bit rusty. In MotoGP most guys won't ride their MotoGP bike until the next race and that can be separated by weeks. We can. And we use that to our advantage to get out to practice starts and cornering and our weak points from the weekend.







Tim Gajser, Team HRC, MX2 and MXGP World Champion: Riding helps keep the rhythm. I cannot imagine doing just one day of practice and then going to a race. We are used to doing the motos.

Jeremy Seewer, Team Suzuki, MX2 GP winner: It's a good question actually because there is a lot of risk every time you step on the bike, but I also think that because we ride so much then we get so used to the speed, jumps and feeling on the bike and it actually lowers the risk. Road racers who dip into motocross now and again are obviously not bad riders but because they are not on a motocross bike as often as us there is more risk and they maybe cannot handle every situation as well as we can.

Jorgensen: It is important to keep sharp in your mind to have a week off means that you won't forget to ride a bike...but maybe you won't react as fast and that's the main thing with riding during the week.

Simpson: If you don't do it then I believe you don't feel at one with your bike, you feel a bit stiff. Also if you ride during the week and have a good day then this carries on into the weekend. I guess MotoGP guys ride other types of bikes just to have that sensation of 'riding'. Preseason we have to do it a lot to get our conditioning up because in motocross you cannot just jump on the bike and be ready to go like you could possibly in World Superbike or MotoGP. A lot of those guys do their training off the bike; on a bicycle and in the gym just to be physically ready and sharp. Motocross is more rugging-and-tugging the bike around the track. From my observation something like road racing is about picking points, feeding the throttle in, hitting apexes and is a lot more exact than motocross. We still need to hit our lines but we need to be more physically ready for all the changes that can happen every lap and where the bike pitches. We could be in the gym all winter and come to the first race and be 'out of shape' on the bike; that's just the way it is in motocross.





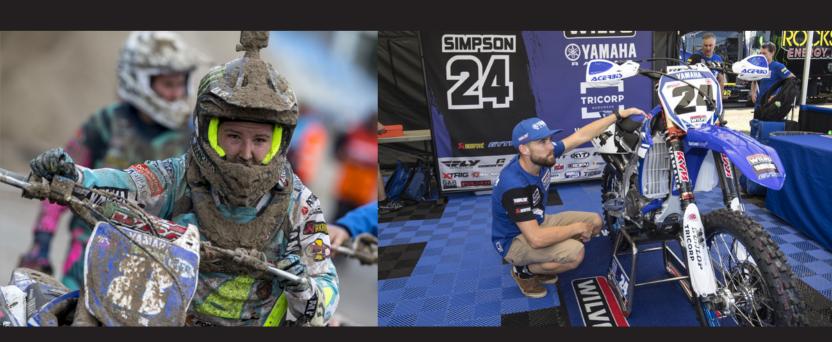
Anstie: From a physical side of things and in terms of speed you are not going to get any faster from week-to-week by riding once between races. You keep topped-up to keep sharp in your body and mind, and on the bike itself. You cannot simulate riding. You don't want that stiff feeling in a first practice session at a GP purely because you haven't been on the bike.

Jorgensen: The base training is done pre-season but trying to keep the riders fit during the season is mostly a mental thing. The weekends involve a lot of riding and race day takes a lot out of you. Monday is basically a recovery day but it is also an important factor for the riders to feel that they are doing the work and to keep the level up. Every rider is different but some feel that if they are not putting in the work then they are going backwards...so there is a big mental component to it.

**Simpson**: Say you tweak your wrist or ankle and you are forced to have two weeks off the bike then you take your time, do some cycling and gym work and physio. You are not riding, and you can go straight to the next race and sometimes have a blinder because of that rest and not hammering your head against a brick wall. Sometimes during the season you can go out testing and come back feeling worse because you haven't made any progress or cannot fix an issue. It can feel like a step backwards, so it can actually be detrimental to ride during the week.

**Kiara Fontanesi, four times FIM Women's World Champion**: I used to be more at the gym and not so much on the bike and I think that was a problem because you don't need to be 100% at the gym but you do need to be that way when you are racing.

**Gajser**: Including the race I would say I ride four days a week: Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday. That's pretty much a maximum during the season. I don't think it's too much and I think other guys are doing more. I've never actually asked another guy what he does.





Simpson: I don't think it is just a case of pounding laps - sometimes it is – but we are trying to working on weaknesses and set-up, suspension and power delivery; the sort of work guys do at road races with their longer weekend. Although we have two days we have to be 'on it' from the get-go. I'll ride one day between race weekends at least, sometimes two. It depends on how I am feeling and how hard the GP was before and what the upcoming race is like. Very rarely will I ride Wednesday/Thursday. It is more Tuesday/Wednesday. That way it gives you Thursday/Friday to cycle and recover.

**Seewer**: If there are a lot of GPs in a row during the season then I am not riding that much; just recovery and for motivation again for the weekend but everyone has a different approach.

Fontanesi: I changed my structure quite a lot and decide what I am going to do when I get to the track and how I feel and also the condition of the track. Of course if the plan is to make motos then I do it, but I can also change, make some sprint laps or have fun and then go home.

Jorgensen: It is also a matter of mixing things up to keep it interesting for the riders. If it is just 30 minutes plus two laps and then again at the weekends then the motivation goes down. I mix it but the most important thing is the structure and to have a plan that can also be changed; it can depend on the weather, can be the enthusiasm, the track and many things. I can have Thomas working on doing a 'qualifying' session, sprint laps, motos. Whatever fits in with his mood as well.

At this level I don't work too much on technique and that has been the mentality from the beginning. When you work with riders at this level and this age it is very difficult to change their technique, it is something that needs to be done when they are very young and it can confuse the rider if you try to change their style. There are many ways to do it - Stefan Everts stands up the whole way round, Ryan Dungey sits down for the whole lap: there is no paper that says 'do it like this and you'll be world champion'. So I have tried to bring a mentality and structure to the training, to go hard but smart and so far for Thomas it has been working and Conrad is also coming along now. There are many different ways but it is vital the rider trusts what he is doing and knows when he is doing something right.

Simpson: You can make gains. Sand is a lot more taxing. Between the Czech Grand Prix and the Belgian round there is a free weekend so you can get six good days in the sand before Lommel and you have your bike in tune and you feel good. When you first start riding the sand you almost put your leg down in the corners as if you are on hard-pack, everyone knows you keep your feet on the pegs but that only comes when you have the confidence in your bike and riding. So you'll hammer a few hard days in the sand, then recover and you'll know you are ready for a sandy GP. I'll even build my pyramid a few weeks before.

**Seewer**: I do some technical stuff sometimes, like focussing on laps that are not fast but without taking my feet off the pegs or standing up a lot. If I do motos or intervals then I'm not at 100%.





I push hard or get close to my weekend speed but normally at the races I have something extra; if there is pressure then the body can somehow make another step.

**Gajser**: It depends. With my Dad we do different kinds of training. Sometimes it is just a moto and sometimes I have to change the line every single lap and that kind of training is not about the lap-times. It is about riding the track, riding the ruts and trying the lines. Sprints and motos; there are many different ways to train. During a GP you will find one line and hit it almost every single lap. On soft or sandy tracks you can change a lot during the race but on hard-pack you normally have one.

Anstie: You don't have to do two 35 minutes motos; this week I only did 15s and you can do it at 80%. I just focussed on riding and flow. I could have gone two seconds a lap quicker if I wanted to but I looked at doing things nicely; working on how I wanted to feel and ride. I wanted to 'wake up' my body again on the track. You can do physical training the gym or bicycle but your brain has to be switched on when you're riding on the track and the speed simulates what we do on the weekend so it's great.

**Simpson**: If you are just doing your motos then you want to be at 80-90% of your race speed and sometimes doing sprint laps. In my position I have just been doing my motos because I need to get my race fitness up and next need to work on one-lap-raw speed.

**Fontanesi**: You have to make sure you don't over-train on the bike – especially in our case because we don't race so much – because you can get sick of riding.

Since the last round of WMX I was maybe four-five times a week on the bike, which [is a frequency] I didn't used to do. I built a better feeling on the bike and improved a lot. I was not doing long sessions all the time but short ones and I found it helped me a lot.

Gajser: If you have a bad day? It doesn't matter actually: I've had many bad ones! On bad days you just try to change the lines. It is like that quite a lot because you can never have a perfect day all the time. For sure there have been training rides when I wondered how I won a GP the previous weekend! Or times when I wake up and think 'I really don't want to do that today...' In the end you always go and do it. And I think that's important in the end. Even if you have a bad day you go back again, because you love it.

**Anstie**: Even now and again you have 'moments'. Normally in training the intensity is just a bit off race speed, especially if you do a lot of it on your own but the way my team have us training together at the moment - with Gautier [Paulin] and Max [Nagl] - we have to be 'on-it' with the lap-times and we start our motos together for pace. Sometimes we'll have easier days and we won't have to be right behind each other all the way but we are checking and pushing and you get that race feeling. The level is so high in MXGP that you have to be ready to push as soon as that gate drops and go wide-open the whole way and deal with those 'moments'. Be comfortable being uncomfortable. Gone are the days where you could put in a few laps, cruise for a bit and then put the last five-ten minutes together. Thirty-five minutes is short and we can bang it out twice in a day no problem.



We could do three if we had to. There are another fifteen guys who can also do it, so you have to do everything you can to keep at least level or better than the competition.

**Seewer**: 'Moments' do happen in training but not so much because you try to reduce it. Also practice tracks are not that bumpy compared to GP circuits.

**Fontanesi**: Normally I am a really safe rider and even when I am racing and don't go over the limit. It is sometimes a problem. When I am home and training I don't take any risks.

**Gajser**: Training on the bike is a mental thing. If you have a good session behind you then you know you are ready, with more confidence for the race.

Jorgensen: I gave Thomas [Kjer Olsen] eight days off the bike at one stage this season because I felt it was necessary. When you spend a lot of time with a rider you see how the motivation level goes up and down and at that point I decided it was time for a break away from the bike to get him hungry again.

That can sometimes be difficult and puts pressure on me because he trusts me blindly. Those choices have to be done sometimes and for next season we know more about how it will be. People kept telling us about how the year will feel so long but up to his first GP win and the week after I thought 'we can get through it on this level' but it was so difficult and you see other riders having a 'dip' at some point. It is almost impossible to keep at that level of performance the whole season and you need to find a balance.

**Gajser**: Every season we have more races and we start earlier, it feels like every year is longer. The end of the season for me will be October 14th and we started in February. I think it is important to take some breaks and recharge the batteries and to start missing the bike. No enduro, no trial, nothing...to have that feeling that you want to get back on the bike as soon as possible.

**Seewer**: If you go to the weekend and you know other riders have been out on the track twice then it is not easy to accept in your head that you have done less.



#### WHY RIDE?

It is beneficial, mentally, to know you are strong but it is your programme and what you do that counts.

Fontanesi: I honestly don't know what the other girls do because I don't follow them on Instagram and I don't check. I'm just focussed on what I have to do and I have so many things to do during the day that I don't have time. Even if I am checking social media then I don't really have it in mind to see what they have been doing. It's not my style. I grew up listening to my body, so I know what I have to do and how I need to train.

**Simpson**: Access through social media is so powerful these days that you can easily see when everyone else is riding and training, so we are influenced by it. Sponsors have it in contracts now that you have to use social media and most guys are on it. Some still keep private but not many. You can see when people have been riding and practicing and you might think 'f\*\*k me, he's been out whereas I've had a day off...'. It can become a mental thing.

**Jorgensen**: Many times it is a fake world! Riders will take posts from the previous week...but it affects everybody; it affects the riders to see their competition doing the work.

Anstie: I think you can play with social media a little bit but, at the end of the day, I have a lot of confidence in my team's programme and they make sure I am on point with everything, whether it is physical, training or riding. A teammate might have been out riding but I was doing a VO2 max test or another task. We've got all areas covered it seems. Every circle and area – riding,

fitness, feeling – is a search for improvement and to keep pushing. You can see what people are doing on social media... but you don't get to really see all the hard work.







#### scott

Scott manufacture their 550 motocross boot in Italy and the 430 euro set holds an important place in the 2018 off-road collection (now in new grey/neon orange). The 550 catches the eye through the details: the simplistic 'tulip' opening system, the multi axial pivot, easy buckle fasteners, low toe profile and replaceable sole; not to mention a blend of materials that means flexibility as well as protective force. A very decent option for a range of off-road conditions and not just hardcore motocross, Scott have put a lot of thought into this one and the new scheme looks pretty good too.







www.scott-sports.com







#### O E RIVIERA DI RIMINI 27th · Rnd 13 of 18

# ANDIHER TO THE LAST

Blogs by Neil Morrison/David Emmett
Photos by CormacGP



fter another weekend high on tension and drama, we move toward the autumn of the year with another championship leader; that's the fourth of 2017, and the seventh time the title lead has changed hands in case you've lost count. And as Marc Marquez jumped onto the podium's top step and the boos rang out, this had the air of a showing that could swing championship momentum decisively in the 24-year old's direction.

Valentino Rossi's absence through injury and Dani Pedrosa's listless showing in the rain have narrowed a five-way fight to three, but this still remains a dramatic duel that has the potential to go all the way. Here, we pick through the bones of another absorbing duel – the fifth of the year to be decided on the final lap – that showed there is very much life beyond Rossi.

1

### Jeers push Marquez to dizzying heights

At times, life can be fairly exhausting for Marc Marquez, a man whose every action is picked through and examined with a fine comb. There was more 'controversy' – if you could call it that – in the lead up to Misano. A picture on Twitter of the 24-year old

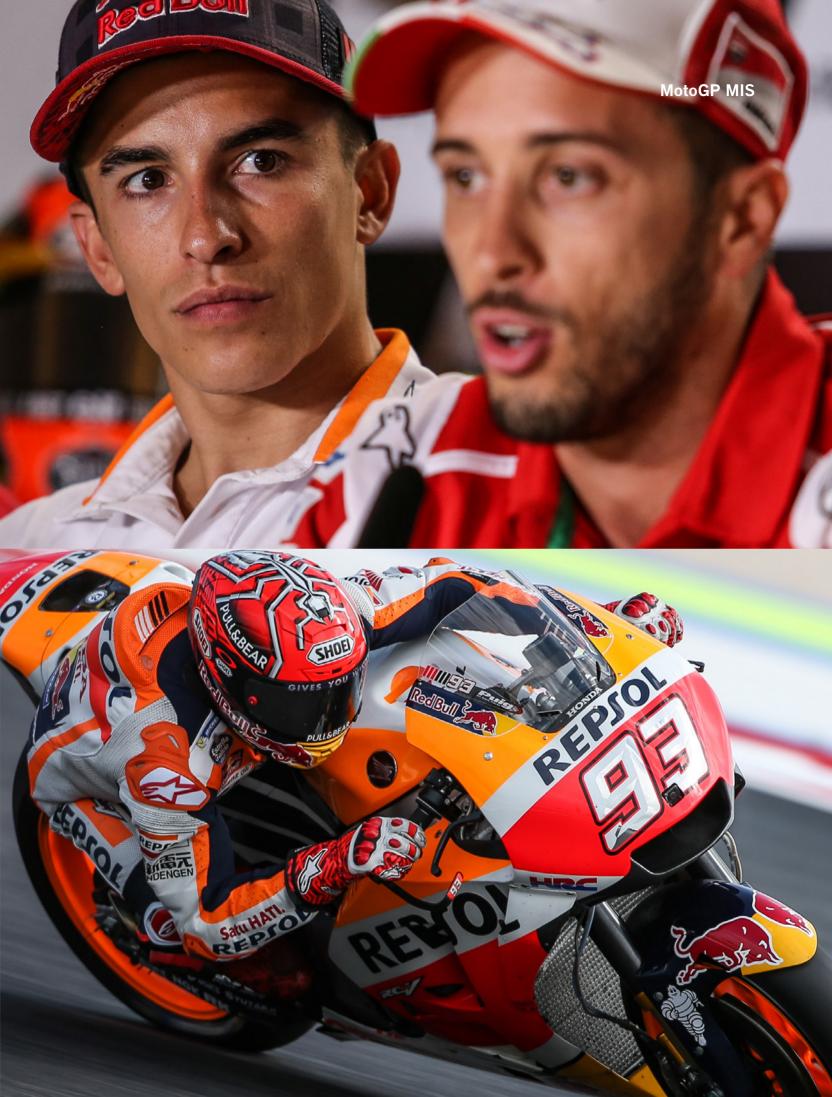
training with a motocross bike the day after Valentino Rossi's accident led a high-ranking journalist of a major Italian sports publication to question whether this was some kind of sneer aimed at his elder rival. No matter he is arguably in the form of his career: for many in Italy, Sepang '15 is still fresher in the memory than his latest dizzying feat on track.

It was no surprise then that he was roundly booed when entering the podium fray in the aftermath of his finest race of the season. Not to worry. He must be well used to it by now, even if that feeling of under-appreciation must still burn the fires within. But it was the cheers that greeted his crash in morning warm-up that stung.

"Honestly this makes me sad," he said. "In the podium I can understand, but what I cannot is that when you crash, the grandstand cheers. This is something that when we crash we are riding 300kph there in the track. We are pushing the limit. Our life is there. We can get injured. I hope that in the future minimum my fans never do this with any rider. The feeling is not nice." Marquez suitably responded by blowing kisses to the cheers that rained down from above.

Not that added motivation was needed in an absorbing title fight, but it is tempting to wonder whether the hostile audience was just one of the several things at play in Marquez's mind as he stalked Danilo Petrucci in the closing laps. The Repsol Honda man had title rivals Andrea Dovizioso and Mayerick Viñales beaten long before that final run of laps, and with Aragon - his favourite track - on the horizon, a low-risk second place would surely have sufficed. Do those idiotic enough to celebrate a rider falling off think a rider of this level will be cowered by such taunts? They are simple adding more coals to Marquez's fire.







2

#### Viñales making a fight out of it

Mayerick Viñales' record in wet races wouldn't have made for encouraging reading for his Movistar Yamaha team when the rain arrived with some intensity an hour before morning warm-up on Sunday. A best result of sixth dotted among two ninths, an eleventh, a twelfth, a 14th and a DNF in his two and a half year spell in the top class hardly speaks of a rider adept in such conditions. Before '17, Viñales always had the Suzuki and its far-from-

perfect electronics to blame. But his wet weather showings aboard the M1 didn't show a grand reversal - the opposite in fact, with underwhelming performances in qualifying in Holland and Germany, leaving the 22-year old outside the top ten on both occasions. "If you know his style, he's not very smooth," explained rider coach Wilco Zeelenberg on Saturday. "He's quite aggressive on the brakes and [in the wet] you cannot load the tyres as you load them in the dry conditions."

That the first wet race of the year came during the title fight's most high-pressure moment represented perhaps

Viñales' biggest task to date to prove he is worthy of wearing this year's crown. Rather than wilt, Viñales responded, posting his best wet weather showing to date. And while he never appeared capable of challenging the leading group, Viñales was fast, consistent, and able to withstand any pressure exerted by Jack Miller and Michele Pirro from behind. Armed with two 2018 prototype chassis that he raced at Silverstone, he rediscovered the front-end feel that was lacking before. Only a lack of rear traction held him back.

"Honestly, it's positive for our side of the box," he said.





"It was probably the best race I've done in the wet. Maybe Marc and Dovi were at the front battling but if we remember from the Sachsenring that I was eleventh and three seconds [slower per lap] in the qualifying, we did a good improvement. The handling of the bike today was really good," he said. "I'm happy with the front. The front tyre and the behaviour of the bike with the front was good. I'm happy. I have the same feeling in the dry – we improved the front feeling. But on the rear it was very difficult to get the traction, especially on the left. It was sliding a lot the bike. I could not lean.

I touch maybe four of five times the left knee down during the race. It was difficult, like going on the ice. But anyway, I'm happy we could do this result. We only lose three points from the leader and we have to continue working like that. There are some races now that for our bike will be good and we have to continue pushing."

This encounter had 'banana skin' written all over it. But Viñales rode with the maturity that belied his 22 years. He, too, loves Aragon and bearing his speed in the dry throughout the weekend in mind, his title hopes very much remain alive.

# 3

#### Suzuki's new nadir?

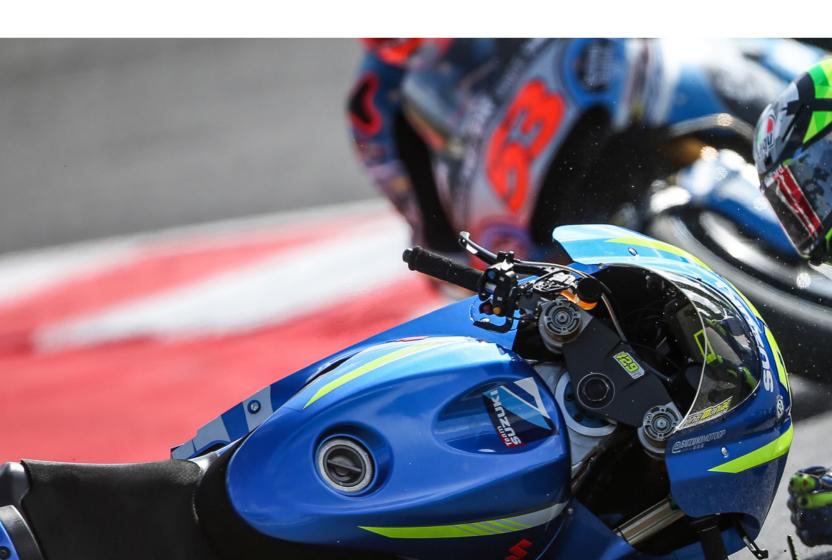
If you thought the Sunday on Montmelò, where Andrea lannone dawdled around outside the points for the majority of the race before limping home a listless 16th was bad, there was the Sachsenring. In Germany the Italian was 24th, and last, in both of Friday's sessions, a day so bad for a factory rider he soon became the subject of a thinly veiled tirade from Suzuki legend Kevin Schwantz. And if you thought it could get no worse than that, lannone was on hand in front of a home crowd at Misano, another abject weekend still very much within him.

It should be noted the Misano layout doesn't best favour the factory's GSX-RR, as evidenced by talented rookie Alex Rins' struggles through free practice. Yet just under a year ago, Viñales proved this bike to be capable of a front row start in similar hot conditions.

lannone was largely anonymous throughout, in spite of running a revised, stiffer chassis, aimed at enhancing his front-end feel.

He notched up another new record by qualifying 21st, his worst Saturday showing in over four seasons in the class.

And then came race day. The rain offered a possible reprieve, but soon after capturing a photo on Instagram, complete with accompanying text that read 'Never Give Up', lannone did just that after 16 laps.



"Sadly I had a problem in my arm," he explained afterwards. "I decided to wear the rain suit for the race, which actually proved to be too tight, obstructing the blood flow to the arms. After two or three laps my forearm started to pump and get rigid, preventing me from riding properly."

The excuse creates more answers than questions. Questions such as wouldn't this issue have hindered him during morning warmup, held in conditions similar to those in the race? Couldn't he, at the very least, have returned to pit lane, taken the rain-suit off, and returned to track?

Looking at how the race was unfolding at that point, there was always a chance of scoring a point or two if you just made it to the finish. Surely the gesture would have, at the very least, displayed a level of commitment to the cause?

The championship makes for grim reading. lannone's points haul of 33 is just six better than rookie team-mate Alex Rins', who just so happened to miss five of this year's 13 races.

The whole ordeal is turning into a sorry affair. And with confidence at an all-time low, and an apparent unwillingness to apply the required effort to stem the tide, it's tough to see where lannone can go from here.















## THAT DIRT-Y THING...

For the second time this year, Valentino Rossi has managed to break himself riding dirt bikes. This time, it wasn't MX, instead, he was riding an enduro bike. "This crash was a relatively simple, small enduro crash," Lin Jarvis, boss of Yamaha Racing told us at Misano. "But the problem is very often – and anyone that rides enduro will know – that many times a crash in enduro is at 0kph but you're in a situation where you put your leg out and you crash, or you break a collarbone or break your wrist or break your knee."

As a result of the crash, Rossi was forced to miss his home race at Misano, and almost certainly the next race at Aragon, with the most likely return date being the Japanese Grand Prix at Motegi. Worse still, he is out of the title chase: his deficit to the championship leader went from 26 to 42 points after Misano, and this is only set to grow after Aragon. He might get lucky and get back 60-odd points in four races from one rider, if that rider were to injure themselves. But Marc Márquez and Andrea Dovizioso are tied for the lead in the championship. The chances of getting that many points back from two riders is pretty close to zero.

Two races in Italy, two serious crashes riding dirt bikes. Isn't that a bit too much risk to be taking in the middle of a season when you're chasing a championship? The overwhelming consensus of the paddock is no. it isn't. Even Cal Crutchlow, who very rarely trains on a motorcycle during the season, thinks that you can't ban MotoGP riders from training on a motorbike. "Soccer players train by playing soccer. Tennis players play tennis. So I think it's good that motorcycle riders ride motorcycles," he told us at Misano.

Andrea Dovizioso pointed out that testing on a MotoGP bike was limited, and that gave the riders little choice. "I think we have to train with different bikes because we can't test a lot with the MotoGP bike," he said." We have to be fit, and the consequence is that you can take a lot of risk. But I'm one of the riders who believes in that training, I think we have to ride motocross bikes and train for the physical condition, but also to train on the bike."

Marc Márquez, an avid motor-cyclist outside the track as well, made his irritation at the suggestion they shouldn't ride bikes very clear. "I hate it when I read sometimes, 'Why are you training on motorbikes? It's dangerous!'" he said. "It's part of our job. Of course we would like to be on the beach and just relax, but there you cannot improve



By David Emmet

your skills, and to improve your skills you need to ride bikes and to train at home. Injuries can happen, it can happen any time. And that's part of our job."

Maverick Viñales backed
Márquez up. "I think it's impossible to be fit if you just stay on the sofa or you don't train on the bike or you don't take any risk. Like going cycling or other things, you always have a risk. But if you want to be fit on the bike, you have to take that risk. You have to take care and to take as little risk as you can, but always riding a motorbike, going cycling, running in the mountains, you always have some risk."

Scott Redding took a more philosophical approach to the situation. MotoGP riders live with danger every day, so there was no point exercising excessive caution. "You guys know me, tomorrow it could all end for me and I'd rather enjoy it," he said. "This is my job, I know and respect that. But accidents happen. You could fall out of the hospitality when it's wet

and break your ankle. It doesn't matter how much you try and protect yourself, The more you try, the more you can cause an injury."

Many riders, many opinions, but in the end it came down to a single fact: MotoGP racers ride MX, dirt track, enduro, supermoto, minibikes, because they all believe it makes them go faster. That belief is crucial, rather than anything else. If they didn't train that way, they would be slower, regardless of whether they are actually learning anything or not. "If for Valentino the ranch works, it really works," Aleix Espargaro told us. "The power of the brain is most important and physically I think now is not like in the past. Now almost all riders are athletes."

So Valentino Rossi will continue to ride dirt bikes at the ranch, and MX, and whatever he believes is useful. Lin Jarvis, his boss, is resigned to that, though he also made it clear that he was no fan of enduro, or riding trails.

"I think that riding on the ranch is different than riding enduro and I think motocross is different again," Jarvis said. "Riding on a circuit anyway is more predictable, riding enduro there is always the unpredictable moment. The element of surprise. Because if you ride enduro, you do huge distance and you probably only do each part once in a day. You never know what you are going to find. So I don't think enduro is the best training, personally, for riding MotoGP."

Valentino Rossi's days of riding enduro bikes is probably over, for the moment. But if they are, then it will be in pursuit of that elusive tenth title. A price he is happy to pay, but only if he believes it will achieve his chosen goal.







## LIFE WITHOUT VALE

He may be out of the running but Valentino Rossi could yet have a say in the ultimate destination of this year's MotoGP world title.

If one were to step into the world of wholly irrational thinking and use twitter as a fair gauge for motorcycling affairs leading up to this weekend, you'd have quickly come to the conclusion that the 2017 title race was a write-off, the grandstands that line the Misano World Circuit Marco Simoncelli would be empty, and the world was imminently going to end. That final point may still be valid with such unruly temperaments lording over the world's nuclear arsenal, but it was a relief to see the first two points proved emphatically incorrect on Sunday.

This recent surge in opprobrium was, of course, heralded by a nasty leg break for Valentino Rossi, which ruled him out of not only his home race but Aragon too. Enough, surely, to curtail that illusive search for II Decimo, the tenth world title, for this year at least. One simple mistake when enduro riding in the hills around Urbino did for Rossi's title hopes what that vicious cold-tyre high-

side through Mugello's Biondetti chicane did seven years before. General hysteria surrounding Rossi's means of training aside, there were valid concerns regarding the overall impact of his absence. If history was a fair indicator, we could expect a fall in not only trackside attendance, but TV audience too. An esteemed colleague remembers that Saturday morning at Mugello in 2010, when fans began upping sticks from those surrounding valleys, heading for the exits as trackside TVs screened medics loading a wincing Rossi into an ambulance. Race day attendance that year was down by 5,000, and the British GP that followed suffered an even greater drop of 20,000, although a changing of circuits (Donington to Silverstone) must be factored in.

Stories did the rounds on qualifying day that pointed to a lacklustre selling of the circuit's last-minute ticket deals. And with the rain clouds building on the horizon, fears were justifiably aired with regards to the race day turnout this time around. Yet even the greenest of MotoGP fans could tell you today's spectacle far outweighs the one offered up seven years ago during the height of the 800cc years, when four riders regularly shared the podium's top step among themselves and just 17 bikes – eight of them fully factory backed - lined the grid.

A walk through the paddock last weekend showed it to be as teeming, as in recent years. The rain on race day did not keep the numbers down either with just a 4,000 drop on '16's attendance. And while Dorna's numbers generally need to be taken with a grain of salt, the 96,324 fans that passed through the gates on Sunday make Misano the fifth best attended race of the year, behind Assen, Le Mans, Montmeló and Mugello. Of the upcoming rounds, only Valencia in mid-November is likely to do better.



By Neil Morrisor

No doubt, truer tests of the series' strength lie ahead: at a round when those planning to attend have not already acquired their tickets, booked their accommodation, and bought their airfares beforehand.

But no one could claim the weekend spectacle was dulled due to one man's absence. The racing was no less dramatic, 80 riders crashed out on race day alone, and the title chase remains as intriguing as it was several weeks ago. The survival of the fittest has narrowed it down to three men. And, although having the 38-year old among the challengers as we prepare for the flyaways would have added that extra sprinkling of excitement, there are still sub-plots a-plenty when contemplating how Marquez, Andrea Dovizioso, Maverick Viñales and their different bikes will cope with the demands of the upcoming tracks, and the added pressure that comes with it.

Think of that battle and then add in a returning Rossi, with arguably nothing to lose, and we can expect real fireworks in the season's closing month. Rossi did speak of the pain he had felt in the days that followed the crash, but that seemed to be more personal disappointment. "It's much worse, the mental condition, because it's a great, great shame throwing away all the chance for the championship," he said. Yet reports - however unlikely - that he is preparing to attempt a return at Aragon underlined just how serious he was about coming back as soon as possible.

Judging by how he recovered from the break of that same right leg in 2010, the Italian should not see his competitive instincts dulled one bit. This injury is "much less serious" than the one which passed seven years ago, according to Yamaha's managing director Lin Jarvis, and imagining him in the middle of any potential dust up at Phillip Island or Sepang makes the mouth water.

For there remains the guestion of whom, of the three title candidates, Rossi would favour winning? We can safely assume it is not Marquez, the man whom the Italian still holds responsible for his painful loss of the title two years ago. Yes, Viñales is his team-mate, a fellow Yamaha man, but one can recall Rossi's carefully timed jibes at the 22-year old when he's been off balance, which, arguably was enough to send him off balance in the all-important summer of the season. Then there is Dovizioso, a rider with whom Rossi has shared no obvious beef in the past. But then nationality comes into it. Another Italian taking the glory?

Fascinating, whichever way you view it. The show very much went on without him at Misano, but Rossi could still have a say in the eventual destination of this crown.







nolan www.nolan.it

MotoGP's official licence agreement with Nolan has seen a range of championship-livered designs appearing on the market over the years. At Misano the Italians unveiled their Ultra Carbon X-lite X-803. A lid that Nolan claim is: 'extremely lightweight and compact (thanks to its high carbon content and the availability of three sizes of outer shell), emergency cheek pad removal system (NERS - Nolan Emergency Release System), reliable visor mechanism with Double Action device, efficient RAF (Racing Air Flow) ventilation system and internal Carbon Fitting Racing Experience comfort padding (with innovative net construction) - these are the highlight technical features that make up this exclusive product, aimed at the more demanding rider.'

The helmet is a result of a close effort with the racing department (Danilo Petrucci and Alex Rins where the product in MotoGP) and is available from November. It will undoubtedly star at the Milan EICMA show the same month. The MotoGP aspect looks quite fetching.











### **MotoGP HEADGAME**

anger, pressure, international stardom (in some countries much more than others) and acclaim, wealth, exhilaration and personal achievement: it is far to say that the life of a top-ranking MotoGP racer is an unusual and special one. Most successful professional athletes hold that rare trait of uncompromising commitment and chemistry a little different to the guy on the street.

With a wish to try and tap into how Grand Prix motorcycle racers strive to reach the heights and then claw and fight their way to stay at the peak of a sport that can be ruthless and perilous, we asked former GP man and Rider Performance Analyst for world championship winning team Movistar Yamaha, Wilco Zeelenberg, for some cues. The 51 year old worked for nine years (and three MotoGP titles) with Jorge Lorenzo and is now assisting the plight of Yamaha rookie Maverick Vinales; one rider vying for the title in one of the closest and most unpredictable contests in years.

Having 'been there and done that' and being an articulate and gregarious character, the Dutchman is ideally placed to have watched and helped two of the most stunning talents to have emerged from the Iberian Peninsula this century. What is it about #99 and #25? How do they drag their bodies half on the ground and hit speeds of 350kmph in their thirsty pursuit of glory? And how does a team and specialists fit around them?

You have had to deal with a myriad of riders and personalities and staff since you came into MotoGP with Yamaha in this advisory role. What has that required from your side? A very open mind? You must have your own beliefs on the best way to go racing...

This is a good question...of course you need to be very flexible. The whole group here is very determined to win, from the mechanics to the riders - everybody basically - and they all have their own way to work. They're very experienced but they still have their own methods and sometimes it can clash a bit. In a group dynamic it is always important to communicate and find the best way for the team and it is not always easy to do that. So you have to keep an open mind to others and what they need. The last thing you want is a big dogfight and I have learned that the best way doesn't mean just one way. In the past, as a rider, you think 'this is how I want to do it' and in my case I wanted to know technical details of the bike because I wanted to know what was going on. Jorge was different. He didn't know a lot about the bike, technically, but he was so good with concentration and finding the limits of the tyres that he didn't need to know. So there are different ways to find race wins and this is the interesting part and it opened my eyes a lot.





The cliché is that 'you always learn' but you've raced in Grand Prix and also done private racing schools so are there really new things you can take from all sorts of riders? Can you still absorb things?

You have to. They have this belief in themselves - for Maverick especially this is unbelievably big - and as soon as you start to take that away then you make them weaker. Sometimes what they are doing might not be the best, but if they believe in it then it's imperative not to take that away. It is better to find what value you are able to add to the race weekend; to be the eyes and ears and give them information that they need to be able to fight. The belief of being the best in the paddock is so important.

'Taking something away' does that mean asking them questions? Causing them to doubt some aspect of their performance?

No, it is about handling pressure and I think these guys can handle a lot but at a certain point – a home GP or whatever – it can be just a little bit too much and [they] can collapse. I'm always afraid of that. In my experience it is also not easy for them to collapse because mentally they are unbelievably strong...but they still need to be a bit careful with what they say in press conferences and in public to manage that pressure, at least until Saturday afternoon when they know their pace, their times and their feeling on the bike for that given weekend. It is about avoiding too much expectation. It is about keeping calm and quiet.



From your experience, especially with Jorge and Maverick, is there usually a bit of an act when things are not going so well? Even from your own time racing: do you have to be 'two people' over a weekend?

Haha! Of course, this is an aspect of the job and some riders are using it more than others. There are the facts of [what goes on in] the box and what goes on in the press conference. This is true.

## Then it is your job to orientate yourself around these 'two guys'?

Exactly. It can be tricky but these guys have been beaten before. They are talented and strong but to get to that level you need have been beaten. They have been on bikes for most of their lives and to lose is almost standard procedure...but they absolutely hate it. This is the difference [with other people]. They might be

disappointed they lost but they somehow come back a bit stronger and they are even more motivated to do better the next weekend. It is nice to see! It means you can also see the difference between a champion and a good rider.

The two riders you've had under your charge at Yamaha came to the team as former world champions but they were/are young and relatively inexperienced. Did you see some immaturity? Maybe some dramatic reactions?

Of course. With Maverick less so because he can handle his emotions quite well. Jorge was always angry quite quickly, he was a 'hot' guy and this is something he is well aware of. So you need to dig into a rider's background a little bit and understand how he reacts before he calms down. You need to be there but also know the right thing to say.



Give them time. We win together and we also lose together and this is important but you also know when it is better to not say much and make a comment that counts.

# Does it take time to know the person and win their trust? So they can use your advice and guidance?

Yes, you need to point out the right things and offer suggestions for them to try. Often they can try a different bike and explain well what is going on to the technicians but sometimes it can also be complicated because there are a lot of electronics involved and parameters and I can see them look into my eyes and say "what do you think?"

### What is it like mentally to race and compete at this level?

I think the rider in this world is very underestimated. If you look at a race like Le Mans when Maverick led almost all the way and had Zarco and Vale on his ass at 0.3, 0.3, 0.3 every lap: to find those laptimes and try to escape from the others is so difficult. He did not want to crash - as Marc [Marquez] had done - but if that feeling gets under the skin then a race is done. So it was a really hard job and then he kept the pressure on Valentino in those last laps. Jorge also had that skill to look at nobody else - just ahead - and go. Those last four laps in France were the easiest for Maverick because he had Vale in front and that benchmark and he made

### "MAVERICK TRAINED SO HARD AND IS SO STRONG PHYSICALLY. THE GUY HAS A LOT OF 'STANDARD' ENERGY; HE WAKES EARLY AND TRAINS HARD. AFTER A RACE HE DOESN'T SWEAT."

The rider realises that you see a lot of things - including other riders - and this makes him curious. The rider only really sees what he is doing, his own bike and situation. He doesn't see other situations. If we switch bikes or settings I can see [from trackside] if the bike is turning better or not. If he doesn't mention it then I will, and little observations about what they are doing on the bike helps him build confidence in me and that I am around and I am another set of eyes and ears for him. I'm not here to point out where he is going wrong but I can confirm his story or thoughts. I'm not always trying to be a smartass!

his fastest time on the last lap. One of the reasons that Vale always comes through [the pack] is that it's easier to follow riders and you save a lot of mental strength for right at the end when it really counts.

## What about off the bike? It is a special lifestyle isn't it?

Yes and I think this is something where we need to get better with Maverick. He is still very young and is very correct when he talks but also very reserved. We need to open him up a bit but at the moment it is a not a big issue because we want to make him a MotoGP World Champion.



This side is something extra that Valentino already has as part of his package and many don't. To make another Vale is practically impossible but to have some extra value for Yamaha is important. Mental strength off the bike is huge... when riders have this then they are starting to head the right way [with their career].

# How have Grand Prix riders changed since your day? More money? More fame? More character/ability?

If you look to the young boys in Moto3 then they are still kids like we were in the past. OK, they are 'developed' better by something like the Rookies Cup whereas we had to do more by ourselves. Now the bikes are too expensive and you need more mechanical support. So the way to come to MotoGP is a bit differ-

ent. You need to be very determined to do your best and be the best. As soon as a rider gets to MotoGP then I don't see many things that changed. Maverick is very down-to-earth and calm. OK, money now is a different story and as soon as they get titles then things change a bit; they have reached their goal and need to maintain the way to win and it gets more difficult. Maverick trained so hard and is so strong physically. The guy has a lot of 'standard' energy; he wakes early and trains hard. After a race he doesn't sweat. Riders are all different. Jorge didn't have that reserve of energy. He was always tired and he trained hard but he doesn't have what Maverick does because he is a different person. It is also interesting to see that riders can have the right day and right race at the right time and win. Determination to win is nearly the same across the board.







### fox

As we revealed in OTOR two issues ago, Fox have worked hard to deliver an alternative to their premium Instinct boot; a product that was sufficiently good for the likes of Ken Roczen, Ryan Dungey, Tim Gajser and Gautier Paulin to wear and develop in the heat and demands of supercross or motocross. Sensible riders are picky about their boots and the protection it offers, therefore Fox have poured a lot of attention and thought into their 180 mid-price range offering. The most eye-catching element is the first silicone closure system we've seen applied to off-road footwear through the top buckle - and the long-term performance (effective sealing against the pant and whether it will last) of this component will determine whether Fox have succeeded or not. It is a novel experiment though and it would be naïve to assume that the 180 has not been tested rigorously. A floating cuff system provides lateral support and the build is a mixture of tough rubber and TPU. For a cheaper and arguably more interesting and potentially excellent alternative to the Instinct, the 180 is well worth a look, especially as part of Fox and Shift's wider and acclaimed gear portfolio.

www.foxracing.com















'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focussed on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP. 'On-track Off-road' will be published online at www.ontrackoffroad.com every other Tuesday. To receive an email notification that a new issue available with a brief description of each edition's contents simply enter an address in the box provided on the homepage. All email addresses will be kept strictly confidential and only used for purposes connected with OTOR.

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